

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE
Of the
Suffolk County Legislature

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Veterans & Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on **February 10, 2005**.

Members Present:

Legislator John Kennedy • Chairperson

Legislator Daniel Losquadro • Vice•Chair

Legislator Cameron Alden

Legislator Jon Cooper

Members Not Present:

Legislator Elie Mystal

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Also In Attendance:

Legislator Allan Binder • District #16

Jay Schneiderman • District #2

Mea Knapp • Counsel to the Legislature

Ian Barry • Assistant Counsel to the Legislature

Fran Siems • Aide to Presiding Officer Caracappa

James Teese • Aide to Legislator Kennedy

Maria Ammiratti • Aide to Legislator O'Leary

Jeanine Dillon • Assistant County Executive

Adam Santiago • County Executive Assistant

Jacqueline Caputi • County Attorney's Office

Holly Rhodes•Teague • Director/Office for the Aging

Bob Smith • Director/Veterans Service Agency

Tom Isles • Director/Suffolk County Planning Department

All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Alison Mahoney • Court Stenographer

(* The meeting was called to order at 1:42 P.M. *)

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Okay, I would like to call the Veterans & Seniors Committee to order. Legislator Alden, if you would lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance, please.

Salutation

Thank you. Okay, moving to the agenda. Since this is the first meeting this year of the Veterans & Seniors Committee, I invited the Director of our senior citizens office, Ms. Roads •Teague, to come down and just speak with us briefly, if you could, please.

MS. RHODES •TEAGUE:

Sure.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Just a couple of minutes, if you would, about the present status of our County's senior citizens efforts.

MS. RHODES •TEAGUE:

I'll just give you a little bit of a history of it. We were the designated area agency on aging that comes to the State, we were designated that in 1974. Because we have that designation we are allowed to accept the Older Americans Act funding and the State funding for aging, and usually the funding comes down on a per capita formula that they have. So we, over the past couple of years, because the population has increased, our funding has increased from the State.

The office, we have approximately 50 employees, 50 to 60 employees, a main office here in Hauppauge, a little tiny office in Riverhead. The budget runs a little over \$14 million, we receive reimbursement of about eight and a half million dollars. Of that 14 and a half million,

the EPIC has taken our reimbursement level down because that is a one hundred percent funded program. So, you know, we are fairly well funded, though, if you keep EPIC to the side.

The goal of our office really is to assist seniors over 60 to stay in their home, independent, as long as possible to keep people from being institutionalized prematurely, that is the main focus of our office, and we do that through a lot of different programs. A couple of the programs that we do directly are the expanded In•Home Services to the Elderly Program which is a case management program that provides home care, that program is very well used, we probably deal with about 650 people a year who are on the case management program and we probably have 600 people waiting at any given time. So that program is a well used program, it's very well •• you know, it's needed. And we anticipating under the Governor's budget the possibility of additional funding for that program this year, we'll see how that plays out; so where everybody else is losing money, we may be receiving some extra this year, we'll see.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

How many case managers do you have with _ISEP_ these days?

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

I believe we have about ten.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Okay.

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

Eight or ten and then we have the advocates. Two of the towns do their own case management, one that we fund, Islip has their own case management program because that was in place when the County actually started _ISEP_ , and East Hampton does their own case management and they fund theirs themselves.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

So ten case managers serving eight towns.

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

Yeah, pretty much.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Okay.

MS. RHODES • TEAGUE:

But, you know, that is a need that everybody wants, you know, they want to stay home in a house, they don't want to be put into a nursing home or an assisted living place. So that's where we spend a lot of our time.

There's a lot of other services we provide through contractors, the biggest one that everybody knows about is a nutrition program, Meals•on•Wheels, that is a very large program, well used throughout the County. We also have resident repair, we have a respite program, ombudsman program which works with the adult homes and the nursing homes in Suffolk County, we have support groups and counseling for caregivers under the 3E Program which is a fairly new Older Americans Act Program that started about four years ago, and that's •• you know, that one's growing, we have some case management in place with that as well and some home care. We also have the legal assistance where we fund legal service through George Roach's group, and we have telephone assurance, reassurance, family visiting. So there's quite a number of programs that we have but they are contracted out, we are mandated to contract out our programs unless we receive a waiver to do that. So the ones that we do in•house are the case management and the information and assistance, you know, and the advocacy are done through the office directly.

Most of •• just to give you an idea of what our •• the issues that we get from the seniors, and we get phone calls, we get about 15,000 phone calls a year and the advocates are also out. Affordable housing is always a major issue, transportation is another issue, affordable health care and long•term care, those are the four biggest issues facing the seniors in Suffolk County and probably the biggest issues facing seniors everywhere, but that's •• we hear about them an awful lot.

A long•term issue that's facing the Office For Aging is just the demographic change that's happening. Between 1990 and 2000 there was a 13% increase in seniors, we went from 198,000 to 224,000 seniors in the census; it's 15.8% of the population of Suffolk County. The over age 75 increased by 28%, the over 85 increased by 40%, and those are the age groups

that really are looking for the long-term care assistance, the home care, you know, the case management, so we know that those numbers are growing. The east end towns have the highest concentrations of elderly, talk about Shelter Island, 34%; Southampton, 21%; Southold, 28%; Riverhead, 23%; East Hampton, 21%; so the east end towns have small numbers but very high concentration of seniors.

What's happening •• if projections that I've seen from the Cornell Institute is from 2000•2015, they're talking about 37% increase in over the age 60 population. They're expecting that our population will go from 224,000 to 308,000, so we've got a lot coming down the pike that we have to work on and it's not just going to be impacting my office, it's going to impact everything that we do in Suffolk County. The elderly, you know, there's a big wave, 34% is a huge increase between 2000 and 2015. So it's something we're looking at and I think, you know, we'll be doing more with. So that's the office in a nutshell.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Well, thank you, I appreciate that. Just to touch base, it sounds like what you're saying to us at this point, though, is for the '05 Operating Budget you are adequately staffed, I guess, to meet the needs that you have now, although you do have a standing waiting list?

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

That waiting list, my understanding from •• because I'm here seven years, but that waiting list has been about that for as long that program has been in existence.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Okay.

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

You know, so yeah, we're holding our own.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Thank you very much.

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

Sure.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Anybody have questions?

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Thank you.

LEG. COOPER:

Holly, a personal question. I turned 50 last week, are there any programs under your jurisdiction that I would qualify for or ••

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

No.

LEG. COOPER:

•• am I jumping the gun at this point?

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

If you were looking for employment over age 55 we could help you out, that's pretty much it. We really work with over 60; under the Older Americans Act that's the number we use, and for a lot of the health care it's over 65. Be thankful you're only 50.

LEG. COOPER:

I needed to hear that, he says I'm not an older American yet.

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

Did you get your AARP card?

LEG. COOPER:

I got the invitation in the mail, I haven't responded yet.

MS. RHODES•TEAGUE:

Yeah, they're pretty •• I don't know how they do that, they get everybody when you turn 50. Yeah, they're pretty evil I think.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Well, thank you very much for coming down. I appreciate you taking the time to go ahead and talk with us.

MS. RHODES • TEAGUE:

You're welcome.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

I have no cards for anybody to address the committee, so ••

LEG. ALDEN:

Do you want to hear from Bob Smith?

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Sure. Bob, if you want to come up for a moment and talk to us, I would appreciate it, absolutely.

MR. SMITH:

Good afternoon. My name is Bob Smith, I'm the Director of the Veterans Service Agency of Suffolk County and very proud of that position. And I thank all of you for being on this committee because it's a very proud committee to be on, with our country at war and all our National Guard and Reservists are all going to be becoming veterans when they are discharged.

I'll just briefly tell you a little bit about what we do. We have offices in Riverhead and here in Hauppauge. Suffolk County is the home to more veterans than any County in the State of New York, we have about 110,000. We have more Vietnam•era veterans living in the State •• in Suffolk County than any other state in New York •• any other County in the State of New York and about the third highest in the country. The veteran population is dying at a thousand a day because of the World War II Veterans becoming of age now between 78 and 85 years old. But every time someone gets deployed and comes back and gets discharged, the veteran population is growing so we should stay at the same numbers.

We take care of all the veterans in the County and believe it or not, their spouses because there's a lot of benefits that go unknown that we go out and tell the people about; widow's

pension, aide and attendants, pensions for widows or single veterans who are in nursing homes get pensions that cannot be taken from them. So our staff is out and we contact all the nursing homes in the County and we tell them about their benefits. I have a column called Veterans Corner that's very popular and it's •• I get a lot of mail and letters where I respond to people. Our office is probably the best Veterans Service Office I would say in the country, they're very well trained. This administration sends them for training, we have classes coming up in Washington, and it's really mandated because you have to •• you can't advise our people, our veterans if you're not trained in the field, so we always stay abreast of what's going on, benefits change all the time.

We have about four to 5,000 walk•ins a year and we have about 16,000 recorded phone calls a year, so a we're busy staff. We only have five Veterans Service Officers and a couple of clerks that take care of this whole County, so we work hard and we do a good job. I'm very proud of the staff. Do you have any questions you would like to ask of me?

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

No, I was just going to say that I'm directly familiar with the work that your office does and I know you do an excellent job. I look forward to working with your office, you know, throughout the year on the issues that come to the surface. And I'm glad you mentioned your column, I read it every week and it is very informative.

MR. SMITH:

If you have any constituents, and this would be for all the Legislators, some of the questions are very complex and you really don't have the answers at your finger tips, but any veterans issues, just feel free to send them over to our office; just tell them that you referred them and we'll address them immediately.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Thank you. Any questions from the committee?

LEG. COOPER:

Actually, what I'd like to do, Bob, is maybe in my next newsletter include an article, maybe two or three paragraphs about your agency and in broad brush strokes talk about the services, programs that you offer. If I contacted your office, would you •• do you have anything

prepared that we can ••

MR. SMITH:

I'll have it sent to your office.

LEG. COOPER:

Great.

MR. SMITH:

You don't have to contact me, I'll take care of it.

LEG. COOPER:

Oh, please; great, thanks.

MR. SMITH:

Would all of you like something like that?

LEG. ALDEN:

Yeah, please.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Yes, certainly.

MR. SMITH:

Done.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Legislator Losquadro?

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

I just want to just make a quick statement. Number one, I would just like to say it was a great honor for me to serve as Chairman of this committee last year. I'm very happy to see it turned over to the very capable hands of Legislator Kennedy who I know will do a very good job. You have two wonderful advocates in the department heads that you see in front of you and I know

they'll continue to do a wonderful job, as they have in the past. So good luck to you and keep up the good work to both our Office For the Aging and Veterans Services, so thank you again.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Well, thank you. I benefit from having chairman alumnus on the committee here to kind of guide me along. Thank you for coming down, Bob, I appreciate it. And as I said, we all look forward to working with you throughout the year.

MR. SMITH:

Thank you all for your support.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Okay. All right, let's move on to the agenda, we have one item.

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INTRODUCTORY PRIME RESOLUTIONS

Okay, we have one resolution it's ***IR 1033•05 • To expand funding for observance of Memorial Day for Calverton National Cemetery, Long Island National Cemetery at Pinelawn and other cemeteries (County Executive)***. Do we have any questions on the resolution, any comment?

MR. SMITH:

I will make a comment.

LEG. ALDEN:

Absolutely, we need an explanation. And I'd also like to ask Legislator Losquadro, I know that last year he put a resolution in, and maybe it was more than one, that actually I thought took care of providing for services and some of the flags and things like that that were required for Memorial Day.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Thank you. Can you speak to us about at all, Bob, about this, about this resolution?

MR. SMITH:

Well, this resolution, what it did was it took the \$1,500 and raised it to \$3,500 to give them

some additional funding. Really the main purpose on this was to recognize private cemeteries; they're sometimes overlooked and we want to remember those contributions in a small gesture by remembering the veterans that deserve a flag at their grave site, in private cemeteries also, provide the funding for veterans groups to buy some flags.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Yeah, last year we ran into a problem, the \$1,500 was originally passed by a Certificate of Necessity and that created a problem because no one ever did any follow-up on it. And by being dropped on the full body of the Legislature through a CN and having never come through this committee, no one was aware of a deadline for which this money would sunset and we had to file a bill to extend the date by which they could receive reimbursement. Now, that was specifically limited, I believe, to the national cemeteries, was that correct, in its previous form?

MR. SMITH:

That's my understanding.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

All right. So this would •• and part of the •• again, part of the problem there, I think we had some difficulty finding some of the organizations because there is Federal funding provided for those observances; is there not?

MR. SMITH:

Yes, that's why I emphasized the private cemeteries.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

The private cemeteries. Now, that all sounds good, but if we could just get an explanation as to where this money is coming from, it certainly •• I agree that adding the private cemetery is a very laudable goal and being that the Federal government already provides for those services at the national cemeteries, it's something that I do think bears certainly looking into further, but I would like to know first and foremost where the money is coming from. Do we know that, or is there someone here from the County Executive's Office that could comment on that?

LEG. ALDEN:

I would like to just amplify on a little bit of what Legislator Losquadro is talking about, because I'm all for providing services for the veterans. Now, I see the County Executive's name on

here, but I also know that I put a resolution in to provide funding for an after school program that would deter kids from drinking and driving and would give them an alternative to going out and drinking and driving, getting drunk on their prom night and the County Executive has refused to send that money, has absolutely refused to send that money to the school that I designated for it. So if the County Executive is taking that money and he is going to use it here, that's a story that I want to hear about. And I also want to hear about why the County Executive now has focused on this type of a program when he's totally ignored the people in my district that it was my responsibility to put the legislation in to give these kids an opportunity to go something other than go out and get drunk on their prom night and do drugs and that is turned down completely.

LEG. COOPER:

That was member item funding?

LEG. ALDEN:

It was a member item funding, yes, that ••

LEG. COOPER:

What was the rationale for turning it down?

LEG. ALDEN:

One of the •• I think the Chief Deputy County Executive said, "Oh, Alden's name on here? We don't do breakfast," and put an X through it. And now within 20 days that funding won't be any good anymore and it goes to fund balance, after they jerked the people around. And it's through the PTA over at Islip and other groups that got together to provide an alternative for these kids so that they wouldn't go out and get drunk, now the County Executive's Office has jerked them around for a good six to eight months and now is running the clock out, so to speak, on them. So I would like to •• I'd like an explanation of where you're getting the money here from. And also, as long as you're here from the County Executive's Office, what's going on with stuff like that?

MS. DILLON:

On your issue, Legislator Alden, I'm not aware of the specifics of what happened but I can follow•up for you and get back to you at a later date.

LEG. ALDEN:

I hope very quickly because that money is lost to that program within •• if it's not •• if that check isn't cut within the next couple of days, that program is gone and those kids won't have an incentive to not go out and drink because this provided an alternative program. Similar to the one that the County Executive talked about funding for the whole County when he talked about it in his State of the County Address, that he wanted to provide alternatives for kids so they didn't go out and get involved in gangs, didn't go out and drink and drive, didn't go out and do drugs, and here's a program that does exactly that, has nothing to do with him, it was a Legislative priority, and this guy is refusing to send that money.

MS. DILLON:

What's the name of the contract agency so I could follow up?

LEG. ALDEN:

It would actually have to go through the Islip School District, but it's •• it's through the Islip School District and I can get you the exact name of the program.

MS. DILLON:

Okay.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Mr. Chair?

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Thank you, Legislator Alden. Legislator Losquadro.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

I couldn't provide you the list of my contract agencies that have not been approved because it's basically all of them. And to keep on point to this committee, all of the senior groups within my district have not been provided their money, my VFW and American Legion Posts that I provided funding to that are relying on this money as part of their operating expenses for last year have not gotten their funding; the single largest senior group in my district that I provided a large portion of my member item funding to, \$1,500, has not received their funding.

MS. DILLON:

Was there any sort of issue with filing paperwork on time?

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

No.

MS. DILLON:

I'm just asking.

LEG. ALDEN:

Absolutely.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Oh ••

LEG. ALDEN:

In my case, in his case, I could absolutely say all the paper work was in way, way before the deadline.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

No, my staff has been very diligent about this, we have been trying to track it, to no avail. In the last Health Committee we were made aware of a situation, you were here for that, where a department head said on the record that a contract that was denied had not been provided by his department. So that begs the question, is that the case with all of these? I know we ran into a situation through Office For the Aging where they did review it, there was a decision handed down supposedly by the County Attorney's Office that said that an individual Legislator would have to be a signatory to that contract. And myself, not being an attorney, was just even appalled just knowing, you know, basic government that I as an individual Legislator cannot bind the County to anything. We act as a majority in the Legislature, so how could that be? I wound up having to file a resolution which this body unanimously passed directing that that signature line be removed from those contracts, it subsequently was and that group has still not received their money.

So you're just the messenger today, I understand that. But you're sitting there with sort of

your mouth open sort of aghast at this and you should be because none of us here have answers. As Legislator Alden has pointed out, this money is going to sunset and these groups who we have chosen to fund out of discretionary funding that we get to select worthy groups within our districts are not going to receive this money, let alone the money that we provide in larger amounts through Omnibus funding for very worthy organizations. So I would expect an answer in a very timely fashion on this, because if we lose this money, this is not our doing. The County Executive's Office is going to have to answer for this to these individual groups who are going to lose out on this funding and have been waiting all of last year and have still not received this money.

MS. DILLON:

I can't imagine •• I can't speak for the admin •• I can't imagine that the County Executive would prevent these contract agencies from getting their funding, but if you fax me a list of the organizations, I will follow•up and speak with the County Executive about your concerns.

LEG. ALDEN:

Yeah, because it's a major question; does the County Executive care about the children of this County, the vets and the seniors? And if you're going to hold up funding to those organizations, that's showing a lack of care.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Ms. Dillon, I appreciate you going ahead and hearing the concerns I guess that we all have as far as where things are going with funding across the board for the agencies. We still have the matter of this resolution, 1033, though.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Where is the money coming from?

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

And we've asked that, I see nobody here from BRO. I'm going to turn to Counsel, though ••

MS. DILLON:

I can only answer ••

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

•• and ask Counsel, are there any things that you see with this resolution at this point as far as, you know, questions that can be answered or concerns?

MS. KNAPP:

I always defer to Budget Review, as you know, on these questions, but this is one actually that is fairly simple to answer. The monies will be paid from the County Legislature's 456 Fee•for •Services Account, it's contained in the resolution.

The only other question I would have, when I first saw this •• I don't know if you •• when I first saw this resolution and I checked the section of the code that it amends, I found that last year's resolution that was done on a CN was never incorporated and I suddenly realized it's because these are being done by resolution and it's a Local Law, it should be amended by Local Law. So I think it's in incorrect legal format.

LEG. ALDEN:

Motion to table.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Legislator Kennedy, I'll be happy to work with you as Chair on this and I think we should craft not only a legally correct bill ••

LEG. ALDEN:

Right.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

•• but also find a proper funding source or offset for this and I'll be happy to cosponsor that with you and we can move to get this taken care of to properly recognize the veterans of this County.

CHAIRMAN KENNEDY:

Okay. We have a motion to table IR 1033, seconded. All those in favor? Opposed? ***The resolution is tabled (VOTE: 4•0•0•1 Not Present: Legislator Mystal).***

All right, any other business? No? We're adjourned. Thank you.

(*The meeting was adjourned at 2:07 P.M.*)

***Legislator John Kennedy, Chairman
Veterans & Seniors Committee***

_ _ • denotes Spelled Phonetically